

THE SEX HYGIENE DRAMA BREWS A NATIONAL STORM



Mrs. Richard Bennett, at the left at top of page; Richard Bennett in center diagonal; Eugene Brieux at right; the Bennett family in group photograph.



In the weeks and months to come you will hear many people talking in your home, or office, and in the close of all sorts, about "that queer play" or "that horrible play" which Eugene Brieux, the Frenchman, has written about a very distasteful subject. It is a play that has caused hundreds of thousands of people who have seen, read or been told about it to indulge in moral and mental spasms.

The name of the play is "Damaged Goods." Some ministers of the gospel defend it, others condemn it roundly and unsparingly. The doctors allied with the American Medical Association not only endorse it but permit it to be produced throughout America with their indorsement and, the management goes so far as to say, under the doctors' auspices.

Social workers, civic reformers—men and women, many creeds—give it sanction.

"Horrible!" cry those of the one side. "Splendid!" exclaim those of the other.

The one side tells you that it is a play that conveys an education of an important and proper sort; that it is a thundering "Thou Shalt Not" reared into the brains of those who witness its production. They say that it will be difficult to take an orderly, conservative, day-by-day mind and make it accept this championship of a play dealing with an unpleasant and horrible subject.

At any rate, the subject is talked about not only from the stage but in the home, in pulpits, by people grave and gay, by the modernists of life and by the conservatives or reactionaries.

To deny the possibility of race betterment is the worst form of infidelity; it means to be without faith in self, in fellowmen and in the Creator. Race betterment, which, of course, includes and depends upon self-betterment, should influence our daily lives, form a basis for our ethical judgments, determine our political activities, and be a strong motive in our religion.

That statement from Victor C. Vaughan, dean of the University of Michigan medical department, and world-famed advocate of eugenics, was made in reply to recent utterances of Bishop E. D. Kelly of the Detroit diocese of the Catholic church, who declared that the religion that holds God as the author of the human soul must carry on warfare against so-called science, which, under the captious terms of sterilization and sex-hygiene, interferes with man's natural powers contravenes his God-given free will and robs children of purity and innocence.

Dean Vaughan defends the science of eugenics in the following article:

"The eugenist is trying to accomplish two things, both of which are essential to the welfare of the human race. One is to prevent the multiplication of bad stock, and the other is to encourage the replenishment of the good. The science of eugenics can succeed only by the help of legal enactments. There must be laws preventing the marriage of and reproduction by the unfit. 'Crime is a disease due to heredity or environment or both, and at present we permit it to breed and come to maturity in our midst. It will not grow less as long as this continues. Its breeding places should be located and disinfected. No child should be born into this world save from good stock.'"

"However, 'good stock' needs some explanation. By good stock, the eugenist means one relatively free from undesirable, unfit characteristics, and the most important of these are alcoholism, feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, insanity, pauperism and criminality. All those classes should be excluded from the

list of those to whom is granted the privilege of exercising the highest, holiest, most important function of the race—parenthood.

"The eugenist does not propose that marriage selections shall be determined by statute, but it does propose to educate the young that selections shall be made on more rational grounds than at present. The eugenist does not aim to degrade or abolish the institution of marriage, but does aim to inculcate the idea that marriage is the highest and holiest of institutions—so holy that he who dishonors it shall be counted worse than an infidel. It is no free love scheme, for that would lead to physical, mental and moral debasement.

"The eugenist will endeavor to induce the state to aid in the evolution of the superman by restricting the reproduction of the obviously undesirable. It is even now a crime by statute in the State of Michigan for an individual of one sex to infect one of the other with a venereal disease, whether the relation between the two be that of husband and wife or otherwise. However, such a statute is at present without other than educational value. Inasmuch as the prevention of crime is much wiser than permitting and then punishing it, the state will go further and demand that marriage be permitted only to those free from such diseases.

"It will come to pass that every wise man and woman will undergo a medical examination once or oftener each year to ascertain whether they are sound. In working out the problem, the state must supply expert medical advice, because this opportunity must be open to poor and rich alike. Already the sterilization of certain classes under certain restrictions has been legalized in eight states, and in one the operation has been performed on more than 700 individuals. The state has a right to protect its honest citizens against those who are evil. In order to secure protection against the evil door, the state may and does often take his life; may it not therefore render him incompetent to reproduce his kind?"

"For many reasons segregation is better than sterilization, the chief objection being the greater cost. But the cost of that method, as great as it would be, is much less than we now bear from the unrestricted multiplication of these classes which now occupy our courts, necessitate a large police expenditure and fill our reformatories, asylums and penal institutions. The suppression of disease, both that are transmissible from parent to child and those which affect only one generation, is a state problem and must be solved by the state."

Here you may read "the other side" of the debate Brieux has brewed by attempting to teach sex hygiene on the stage.

Says the assailant of Brieux and

all that his morbid drama is taken to represent.

"In all probability Monsieur Brieux has done much better work than his 'Damaged Goods.' The picture he shows us in 'Damaged Goods' is not true to life, socially, or humanly, speaking. What it tells us of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children was known to be true long before the writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes. But Brieux insults every normal man, he insults the average man, when he sets before his eyes as something even approaching a type of his sex, a male biped who will indulge himself in cyprantia reveals the night before his nuptials.

"The success of Brieux in pandering to the depraved taste, not of the public, but of theatrical producers in Paris, may result in his case, as it did in Zola's, in bringing out much of his earlier work, infinitely better, and assuring him a permanency of fame. Many of Zola's earlier books were rejected of the publishers. Others, which he had published at his own expense, failed of circulation. Not until 'L'Assommoir,' a cesspool of social and moral stink, appeared, did Zola, not a vague, quickly following it came 'Nana,' in which the cesspool, which could not be made fouler, was dug deeper. The multitude which had read 'L'Assommoir' knew Nana to be the daughter of Gervaise, 'L'Assommoir's' miserable, degenerate woman.

"But not until after the smashing success of these two monstrous books did they learn that Gervaise

and Nana were the fruits of a tree planted in Provence a century and a half earlier by the marriage of a Rougan and a Macquart, themselves the fruits of corruption. Zola, in nearly a score of volumes, had traced their descendants through five generations. In all of the books preceding the last two he had shown power, beauty, analysis of character, motive and temperament, the modifications of environment on heredity, struggle and surrender, struggle and partial triumph, politics, commerce, finance, society in high places, a panorama of human life. But all of this really great creative and constructive work had been passed by unheeded until Ger-

vaise and Nana, the last apples of Sodom on that baleful tree, had rotted to their fall. Good can come

only after the evil that he did in the

Rougan-Macquart. 'Damaged Goods' can be only evil in effect if it does

some good done by Monsieur Brieux in his earlier work, rejected of the masters."